

FACTSHEET

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Animal and
Plant Health
Inspection
Service

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APHIS and Agency Stakeholders Work on the Y2K Problem

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is taking the Year 2000 (Y2K) computer problem very seriously. All USDA agencies, including the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), have been charged with fixing their own Y2K hardware, software, facilities, and property problems *and* reaching out to agency cooperators and stakeholders about this important threat to the U.S. food chain.

You're eating today. But what about January 1, 2000? Will food get to your grocery store? Will you have energy with which to cook it? Should you stockpile 6 months' worth of food staples and bottled water? Is the bottom going to fall out of the U.S. economy because old computers can't handle the four-digit date codes required to process data after the end of 1999?

The American Food Chain Will NOT Fail

USDA's Food Supply Working Group, an interagency task force working with the White House Y2K awareness and remediation effort, has surveyed America's farmers and ranchers, food manufacturing and distribution trade groups, and other segments of the U.S. private sector, like transportation and energy, that can affect the progress of foodstuffs from field to table. The overall news is good! Foods normally available in the winter months will be on your grocers' shelves before and after the zero hour. Spot shortages may occur here and there, but staples will be available. Imported food specialty items may be harder to find than usual because of Y2K-related transportation problems in the shipping sector outside the United States. But within-country transport of agricultural products is not likely to be disturbed because the rail and truck industries are on schedule with the bulk of their remediation work. Agricultural exports from this country will not be greatly affected: U.S. cargo carriers are reporting

they expect to operate normally. This news is especially important to American farmers, who currently depend on export markets to sell about \$47 billion worth of their goods a year.

What Does the Secretary of Agriculture Recommend?

It's definitely not time to push the panic button. In congressional testimony in early February 1999, Secretary Dan Glickman advised the public to stockpile a few days' worth of food and bottled water and to set that cache up a couple months before the end of the year. He spoke in terms of taking the same kind of sensible precautions that most people do to prepare for unexpected winter storms or electrical outages. [The full text of the Secretary's address can be viewed at USDA's home page, www.usda.gov, on the World Wide Web. When you get there, click on the Y2K button.]

Are All Segments of the U.S. Economy Prepared for Business As Usual in 2000?

USDA and White House research has revealed that most big businesses are on top of the Year 2000 problem. The banking industry, in particular, has spent billions of dollars fixing its data-management systems. It would be sensible to have cash on hand at the end of the year, but those all-important automated teller machines should still work on New Year's Day, 2000.

Large producers of electricity expect their systems to be good to go, but some small rural electric companies do not think they will be Y2K ready by the deadline. Because of interactions across the power grid between small and large producers, local brownouts could conceivably lead to blackouts in a ripple effect. Keep candles, blankets, and perhaps an alternative source of cooking energy ready at home and you'll be in good shape.

It's more difficult to verify the Y2K status of America's thousands of small businesses. Disruptions in their activities could certainly have a measurable effect on larger entities that depend on supplies and raw materials from smaller companies. Surveys managed by the Food Supply Working

Group have pinpointed this sector as the one likeliest not to be ready for the Year 2000.

On April 1, 1999, USDA joined forces with the Small Business Administration (SBA) to host a nationwide interactive video conference on Year 2000 aimed at small companies. Speakers included Secretary Glickman, USDA's Chief Information Officer, Anne Reed (the Department's top computer person), and technical specialists from SBA. The session finished with a question-and-answer period where the speakers, appearing live from Washington, DC, took on queries from conference attendees at venues all across the country.

Can You Count on APHIS To Be Ready on January 3, 2000?

The sun never sets on APHIS' operations. We're not only active in every U.S. State, we have operations in Europe, South America, Africa, and the Far East as well. We promise to be working as usual on the first business day of the new year—January 3, 2000. In fact, APHIS offices and facilities that normally operate 7 days a week, like our port-of-entry inspection stations, will be working right through the holiday weekend as usual.

APHIS is spending more than \$22 million to fix Y2K problems. Of our 21 mission-critical computer systems, 19 are fixed now; the remaining 2 will be remediated by the end of June. We have inventoried our buildings and property nationwide: the elevators will go up and down, the parking-lot admission devices will let employees in and out, our planes will fly right using remediated geographic positioning system (GPS) software, our labs will continue to process sophisticated animal, plant, and product tests on time, our permits will be issued, our regulations will get published in the Federal Register.

Every APHIS unit has developed business contingency plans, and these will be tested later in 1999. The agency has made sure that every personal computer used by employees is Y2K ready. And we have installed a Y2K-compliant suite of software products for e-mail, word processing, and data-base management nationwide.

We are also setting up a Command Center at headquarters, in Washington, DC, where our field employees will be able to file trouble reports if they find equipment or services are not working right after midnight on Dec. 31, 1999. The Command Center will focus agency experts on troubleshooting and repairing local problems so our people can get right back to doing their work for you.

What Can You Do To Help Us?

If your company shares data electronically with APHIS, it is essential that your own software and hardware be Y2K compliant, too. Sending us data from noncompliant systems may result in rejection or subsequent inaccuracies.

Neither APHIS nor the Federal Government as a whole can fix your Year 2000 computer problems. But we can provide loads of information to help you get this issue under control.

Begin by visiting the Food Supply Working Group's Website, which has hundreds of useful links to other sources of information on the World Wide Web. The Web address is <http://www.usda.gov/aphis/FSWG> and the site is updated several times a week. There's even a Frequently Asked Questions data base there to which you can contribute queries.

You may address agency-specific questions to APHIS' Year 2000 Coordinator:

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Please let us know how we can work with you to continue to ensure the health of American agriculture now and after the start of 2000.

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